Helene, an Individual Soul

She was strange, this child, stranger by being the offspring of commonplace parents. They were cottagers in a village near the sea where I once stayed for a short while. I had been ill, and was compulsorily idle, which is the time when one hungers for company, especially the company of children.

I made my own introduction to her. It was the usual one of a pat on the head and a kindly word. Helene looked up from her play in the dust of the road, and the look convicted me of impudent patronage. Then she went on with her play.

Acquaintance with her parents was easier. Her father welcomed my call for a smoke and a chat in the evenings; but I should have found the home uninteresting without Helene. At first she flew from me like day before night, reappearing only when I had gone; or, if her bedtime came while I was there, she would call her father out of the room to say goodnight to him. Bribes of toys and stweets proved futile. I began to feel like an ogre. Then, and suddenly, she changed. She came to the house where I had my rooms, and asked for me. Did I feel better, because mother had said I was "very bad?

She was only six and diminutive at that—pale, smill-featured child, with firm lips and black hair. Her expression was peculiarly mature, as though her character were already formed.

Her few friends were queerly varied. A headless doll, a dog and Me; these I knew of, and each of us, it seemed, had to be transformed ere we were worthy. The headless doll was a baby. It was sad, she said, because it had no face and its neck was broken. That was why she loved it, I suppose.

The dog, too, was sad. He was a beautiful prince whom a wicked fairy had turned into a dog. He certainly had the saddest face in all the world. It was the brink of tears made into canine countenance. A black, little dog, of no determinate breed, with the round, miserable eyes of a spaniel and the nose of a pug. Her name for him was Sammy, which lent itself well to imperative or coaxing call. Helene had no guests of affection; she was regally undemonstrative. Her utmost caress for him was a little benedictory pat. Herself, she shied from a touch as a colt from the whip.

And then me. Me she transformed, God knows, else had we been strangers life-lastingly. But into what, she never told me. She took possession of me; that was all. There is sadness latent in all of us, maybe, and perhaps my sadness was the sort she understood. I can find no other reason.

Though she was solitary, and we, her loved, a motley trio, Helene had no gloom. She had a nature as radiant as sun on water. When we were all with her, subjects in her kingdom. I believe she was the happiest thing on earth.

We used to go out together, along the lanes, into the fields. We found favorite spots, and would spend the whole morning or afternoon undisturbed. She learned to fill my pipe, and would hold the match, standing the while, her face as solemn as though she were performing a religious rite. When I was sitting and she standing, her height and mine were about level.

She was strangely sensitised. She seemed to quiver to thought-waves. Every mood of mine she could tell. I was cross; I was sad; I was 'feeling bad.' If I made the assertion of these things myself she would contradict me flatly. If I persisted she would dimple into a smile and contradict again. It was impossible to be a humbug to her.

Perhaps because of what her mother had told her she looked upon a lapse of health as a fault; and it was a fault that she declined to condone. Even an accidental sneeze would earn her censure.

"You are naughty," she would tell me, with stress of infinite severity on the verb. Excuse was useless. She would refuse to speak for a long time, castigating me for my good. There was only one explanation of this, and it bred humility. I was precious to her.

When her mood was play she delighted for me to sulk. Her unconcern was exquisite—until it pleased her to feign anger. Then she would threaten dire things. She was going home; she would never come out with me again; it was no good my being sorry. She would even suit the action to the threat and go. But for a few yards. Then, still if I held out she would creep slowly back and bring her face close to mine, her eyes dancing, a dimple lurking in her cheek. The only way to avoid the capitulation of a smile was to look aside.

"Oh, that isn't fair!" she would complain.

Sorrow struck her one day, as it strikes us all. I heard about it from her lips. She came alone to my rooms to tell me—came blindly, I think. Her solitariness was intense that day.

She stood in the doorway looking at me. She was very white and very still. "Sammy's dead," she said.

I could only look.

"He's dead," she said again, passively. "He's been run over. They're going to bury him. I thought I'd like to tell you.

She turned to go. I didn't speak.

"Don't you ever die, will you?" she said, looking at me again.

"I'll try not to," I said. Her little figure had suddenly gone dim.

She went away.

Soon afterward they sent for me from her home. She had found the place where the dog was buried. They had tried to pick her up, and she had bitten her father's hand. When I saw her she was still lying on the grave.

The time came for me, also to leave her. There was no grief shown at our parting. Sammy could never come back; I could. She was never going to have another dog, she said. She told me I should not be 'bad' again, because she prayed for me every night. "But you must be good," she said, "or God might not listen."

She was a strange child, weirdly wise. I often wonder what would have happened to her if she had lived. I think her love story would have been a tragedy.

The Love Classic

The bench was of wooden slats, painted green. Above one end hung pinkish balls of hydrangea; at the other, lilacs nodded perfuming the perfect bower. Upon the bench nestled dreamy Miss Euphrosyne and Major Stanton, whom all his little world called unimaginative.

"I am going to read to you today, major," answered Miss Euphrosyne.

"Humph!" snorted the major. "That isn't what I came here to talk to you about."

"But, major," protested the lady, "I wrote this poem myself. It is a sonnet and its name is 'When Love Beckons.'"

"Humph!" snorted Major. Stanton. "How could love beckon? How many hands has love? Who ever saw it?"

The lady flushed. "Now, don't be foolish. I'm going to read and I want honest, candid criticism?"

The major stirred uneasily beneath the fluffy balls of hydrangea. "But I didn't come to listen to poetry. I wanted to ask you something."

"Listen," cautioned Miss Euphrosyne. Then she began to read in soft, liquid cadence:

"When night has cast her mantle o'er
the sward"—

"Hugh!" interrupted the major. "I gues that mantle of night figure is about the oldest figure ever invented. I think Ham sang it to Shem during the big rain."

Miss Euphrosyne smiled, but not too sweetly, and resumed:

"And the silver notes of Nature's nocturne wind"—

"Hugh! Humph! Pshaw!!!" sputtered the major. "I would like to know who first told a poet notes were silver."

"Major Stanton," said Miss Euphrosyne severely. You might at least be kind."

The major grinned. All right. You said to be honest. Let's get it over. I want to talk about ourselves."

Miss Euphrosyne took up the broken thread:

"Through lea and dale, o'er scarp and
dune and fell"—

"Hey, stop!" cried the major, "is this an American poem, or is it pigeon Chinese or Hottentot? What is a lea and dune? You'll have to cut out that nature faking."

Miss Euphrosyne turned squarely, and her flush was deep, and her voice quivered. "Major Theophilus Stanton, I wish to distinctly understand that I gave you no license to be insulting. if you are not able to appreciate good poetry, you ought to keep still about it. And as for that question you've been hinting about asking—why, I could never care for a man who did not care for sonnets."

"Oh," sighed the major; "that's different."

"My ideal is the man who dotes on poetry," continued Miss Euphrosyne, dreamily.

"Ah," sighed the major; "let's have that exquisitely beautiful sonnet again."

Miss Euphrosyne looked glowingly at the candid critic, then read the sonnet through, dwelling lovingly on each sounding rhyme. When she had finished, she looked inquiringly at Major Stanton. That gentleman had risen to his feet.

"I rise to remark," he said, "that the sonnet just read marks a new era in the world's poetic annals. It makes Shakespeare look like a piker and puts Milton on the blinky-blink. It is rhythmic, liquid and soothing. It has the tones of nature, the fragrance of the forests, the tints of autumn, the carol of spring and the purl of hidden brooklets, all in one. In short, Miss Euphrosyne, your poem is a peach, a masterpiece, a lulu and a classic."

"Oh, dear, dear, major!" sighed Miss Euphrosyne.

"And now," said the major, "about that question?"

"I think we'd better be married in June," sighed Miss Euphroysne.

And the pinkish hydrangea balls nodded over at the fragrant, all-wise lilacs.

"Why did you take Elmora away from school, Aunt Mahaly?" a lady asked her cook one day. Aunt Mahaly sniffed scornfully.

"'Cause de teacher ain't satisfactory tuh me, Mis' Mally. What you reckon she tell dat chile yistiddy? She 'low dat IV spells four, when even a idjut 'ud know dat it spells ivy."—Youth's Companion.

Will ye loan me yer bike, Jimmie?"

"I dassent loan it to ye cos it ain't mine, but I guess maybe it'd be all right to rent it to ye."—Life.

A REAL SANTA CLAUS

A Merry Christmas

All over the country, all over the world—a few years hence it will be also all through the air—sounds the greeting Merry Christmas! On the sea and land, in the palace and in the hovel, in the hospitals and in the prisons, in the asylums amid the orphans and in the homes for the friendless and for the aged, wherever even two persons meet who know and love the story of Christmas, the greeting is exchanged. Where can there be a parallel to the universal greeting? Is there any other sentiment that has the sovereignty of this cheerful and heartfelt word? It travels through the mails like nothing so much as the doves to the altars of which the Scripture speaks, for surely the sentiment flits from altar to altar of the hearts of men and is as gentle as the dove. Grudges and animosity vanish before the wafting of Christmas greeting, the smile of hope illumines the countenances of those under the pall of depression, the dimpled cheeks of the babies seem like veritable nooks for fairy hiding as the lips coo in response to the Merry Christmas, with the little emblem of the day that comes to the infant from its loying parent. In the days of romance hostile forces passed upon the field, sheathed their swords and clasped hands across the battle line, greeting one another with the sentiment of universal good will. Merry Christmas has brightened more hearts, has healed more grievances, has brought more happiness to the lives of men and women, has proved to be the talismanic sentiment for more home reunions than any other that has ever been heard in this old world.

Christmas stands for love and for charity, for hope and for joy at the fruition of that long-made promise of the prophet of the coming of one who should bring peace and good will to earth; so the churches hold their services and the people congregate to join in singing or to listen to the rendition of carols, some of which have come down from the early ages of the church. The children have their Christmas treats, and they are the very merriest of the merry in their participation in these annual school festivals.

VALEDICTORY.

Old Year, thy cup of destined Time
Is broken and a-pieces,
Thy feast ends with the midnight chime,
Thy dance of glory ceases.
Thy dawns and eves have fluttered past,
Thy last stars gem the sky,
And lo! the faithful moon—the last—
Goodby, Old Year, goodby.

Thy snows were purer than the snows
That crown the Alps with glory,
Thy roses sweeter than the rose
Of olden song and story.
Alas, thy gay pageantry
Of days and nights should die,
The bloom has left the rose and thee—
Goodby, Old Year, goodby.

Oh, linger yet, thou canst not part
The golden ties that bind thee,
A strand of love to every heart,
Has fastened and entwined thee.
Good fellowship, occasions dear,
A dream we builded high,
A look, a smile, perhaps a tear—
Goodby, Old Year, goodby.

Ah, years will bloom and fade away,
And be forgot in waning,
But thou shalt still be yesterday
To all the years remaining.
But yesterday, so far withdrawn,
Yet to the heart so nigh,
Alas the chimes are chanting "Gone"—
Goodby, Old Year, goodby.

"Sweet mercy is nobility's true badge." Let us inwardly digest this truism with the Christmas cheer.

"God With Us"

By A. D. WATSON

The world had long been waiting
The coming of the King,
When one sweet morn in Bethlehem,
Ere birds were on the wing,
The sons of God came singing
Down from the skyey dome,
And mortals heard the message:
Immanuel is come.

Now let the ample standard
Of righteousness, unfurld,
Proclaim to every people
That God is in His world;
Let every form of evil
From earth be put away,
That all may sing rejoicing,
The King is born today.

The bright and solemn glory,
The angel harps glad ring,
The strange, sweet song of wonder,
The cherub voices sing—
These in our hearts abiding,
The Prince of Peace shall come,
Make our glad lives His temples,
Our happy hearts His home.

CLOSE QUARTERS.

He eyed the Christmas tree with a look of grim determination on his face. It was a fine tree, tall and straight, with many symmetrical boughs—just such a tree as would delight the hearts of his children. But he chased them away as he prepared for his work of destruction. Taking off his coat he rolled up his sleeves, and with a hatchet ruthlessly lopped off all the branches. He eyed the result with satisfaction. Then he took up a saw and divided the tree in the middle. It seemed heartless, but what else could the poor man do? It was the only way he could make the tree fit, for he lived in a flat.

HER IDEA.

"The custom of hanging mistletoe on the chandelier is foolish."

"I think so, too. It ought to be hung in the cozy corner."

HIS VISITING LIST.

Old Santa—My, my, how this list does grow. No wonder I occasionally miss one.